

The **BOBBY BAKER** by Robert Rowe

story

The explosive facts about
LBJ's protégé and the Capitol
Hill scandal of the decade



BIG-LEAGUE POLITICS IN THE RAW

Everyone in Washington knew that Bobby Baker was going places. He was the fair-haired boy of Capitol Hill—bright, aggressive, much more than just a Senate aide. In the words of Lyndon Johnson:

"I know I should refer to him formally as my secretary to the majority, but my tongue, even as my heart, says 'Bobby' instead."

Then, on October 7, 1963, Bobby Baker resigned. It was sudden, too sudden. Everyone wanted to know why . . . and, as the facts began to appear, they demanded to know more.


Here is the Unwhitewashed Story of the Rise, Fall, and Trial of Bobby Baker.

The BOBBY BAKER story



Robert Rowe



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THE BOBBY BAKER STORY

It is always possible to deprive casual quotes of their original context. But the Johnson-Baker relationship was, if anything, more real, more intense, and more significant than any single quotation can convey. Lyndon Johnson's endorsement to the Senate was not an isolated incident. It reappeared like a fugue throughout Baker's career in and around Congress.

In 1957, for example, Johnson had this to say about his "tireless and indefatigable" protégé:

Bobby Baker is a young man who already has gone much further in life than many others of far greater years, and it is my personal opinion that he is just getting started.

There is a very simple formula that explains Bobby's success. He gives of himself unsparingly and without regard to what he will get in return. . . . He is a man who truly serves his country, and I consider him one of my most trusted, most loyal, and most complete friends.

Again at a testimonial dinner in 1958, where the guest speaker referred to Bobby as "South Carolina's third Senator," and Florida Senator George Smathers sang his praises, Lyndon Johnson sent a congratulatory telegram calling Baker an "outstanding American."

Nor did Johnson's affection go unreciprocated. One of Baker's sons is named Lyndon Baines Johnson Baker, and his daughter is named Linda.

My point is not that Lyndon Johnson misjudged his man. Johnson's view was shared by the majority of the Senate. Senator Robert S. Kerr, the late Oklahoma Democrat who was probably the second most powerful man in the Senate after Johnson, is reported to have said, "Next to my wife and sons, Bobby Baker is the person I love most."

Even the anti-Establishmentarian Senator Paul Douglas, Illinois Democrat, wrote in the September 1958 issue of

Esquire: "One young man . . . is a formidable behind-the-scenes power. He is Bobby Baker . . . Lyndon Johnson's right-hand man."

In other words, Bobby Baker had come to exemplify the best that the U.S. Senate had to offer. He reflected its value, its style, its strengths and its weaknesses.

The scandal of the Bobby Baker case—and there is a scandal—has nothing to do with call girls, and parties, and wheeling, dealing and finagling. All of these elements were present in abundance and have received ample, if distorted, coverage in the press. The true scandal was the Senate's reaction when Baker's affairs were exposed. With a few lonely exceptions, there was no sense of outrage, no shock, no desire to get the full story, and certainly no genuine impulse to reform—to find out what went wrong where and to change the institution that had given Baker his power. Instead, the impulse was to cover up, to forget, to carry on business-as-usual.

And any inclination on the part of the executive to conduct a full-scale proceeding seems to have dissipated with the ascendancy of Lyndon B. Johnson to the Presidency.

It is the purpose of this book to set forth, without prejudice, the facts of the Bobby Baker case, sordid and unsavory though they may be. It is the hope of the author that as more and more facts are put on the record, the people and their representatives will want to take action. Not against Bobby Baker, and not against his erstwhile sponsor, but rather against the prevailing patterns and practices of the U.S. Senate itself.

II

The Antecedents of the Alger Hero— The Kid from Pickens

THE STORY OF LITTLE LYNDON begins in the unspectacular setting of Pickens, an obscure township in the uplands of South Carolina.

The year is 1928. Bobby Gene, named for golfer Bobby Jones and boxer Gene Tunney, is the first of eight children born to Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Baker. Mr. Baker, then a postman in Pickens, is now the postmaster. He dislikes any inference that his oldest son procured his job for him.

Bobby grew up in austere surroundings. The family had a large frame house on Easley Street. Bobby's newspaper route helped the family finances. And according to one former customer, Bobby did his job well. "He'd throw the paper so hard it would bang against the door," the man recalled.

One of his schoolteachers, Lucille Hallum, recalls him as "so vivacious, just a little trigger. If you wanted something done, you gave it to Bobby and you knew it would be done." The people of Pickens seem to hold fond memories of young Bobby Baker. He was a smart boy always willing to help and always smiling.

His peers remember him as a loyal friend, and adults admired his enterprise. One in particular, Dwight Holder, praised Bobby's "spunk." It was Dwight Holder who gave Bobby Baker the chance to be a page in the U.S. Senate.

Holder had served as an area campaign manager for

South Carolina Senator Burnet Maybank. The Senator owed Dwight Holder a favor. In 1943 he offered to appoint one of Holder's sons to a page vacancy. Holder's boys were too old or unwilling to leave home. The Senator then asked Holder to recommend another Pickens lad. Holder suggested his neighbor, Bobby Gene Baker.

The decision involved some controversy. Bobby was reluctant to leave home. A few of the Bakers' friends thought he was too young. At 15, Bobby hadn't even been on a train. One of his best friends told him not to go. But the decision rested with Ernest Baker and his wife. At first they were reluctant, but finally they changed their minds. "We decided to [send him to Washington] because we realized that he would be associated with some of the best men in the country," said Ernest Baker.

So with some reservations Bobby set out for Washington. Before leaving, however, he shrewdly insisted on taking a 10-mile train ride. This way he would never have to admit his first train ride was his trip to Washington.

Bobby arrived in the capital in the midst of the Second World War. The city bulged with war workers. Living quarters were scarce and expensive. As today, there was no dormitory for pages, so Bobby rented a small basement apartment near Capitol Hill. "You could hear the furnace roar at night," a friend recalls.

Bobby missed Pickens from the start. He wrote in a diary three times, "I'm homesick." He sent letters to his friends, wishing he were back with them. When his former teacher, Miss Hallum, learned of his feelings, she wrote to him. "I asked him not to give up, to stay there and fight because we were proud of him and we were with him."

Bobby sent back a brief, if ungrammatical, reply: "Miss Hallum, Bobby Baker don't quit." His patron, Dwight Holden, also advised him to stick it out. "Do whatever Senator Maybank tells you to do. He's gonna be your daddy."

Besides being homesick, Bobby was subjected to the

traditional hazing of the older pages. He was paddled and joshed. He was sent all over Capitol Hill for a non-existent "bill stretcher." When he finally returned empty-handed, he was informed that the "bill stretcher" was the occupant of the White House.

Within a few months, though, Bobby settled down. Senator Maybank was impressed by his personality and persistence, and Bobby helped that image by working in Maybank's office on his days off. Maybank, now dead, was most known in the Senate as a Southern Gentleman and a man of integrity. His political viewpoint was roughly the same as Jefferson Davis's.

The other Senators liked Bobby, too. "Page boys are taught to serve," a Capitol Hill employee remarked. "Bobby learned to serve and he learned the importance of loyalty around here." To no one's astonishment, in the middle of his second year he was named chief page. One of his friends thought Bobby played up to the Senators. "But he had an ability to get away with it."

As a page, Bobby learned the traditions and procedures that dictate much of the routine in the Capitol. He began to understand the pressures Senators faced in and out of Congress and how partisan and regional politics affect legislation. Most important, he realized how personalities in the Senate rule or are ruled.

Bobby was impressed by what he saw. He instinctively enjoyed politics, and friends claim he is a natural politician. "I'd like to be the Governor of South Carolina," Bobby used to say.

It is vitally important to remember that, unlike the majority of the other pages, Bobby was not rich. His problem was getting, not spending. Most of the boys Bobby worked with came from well-to-do families. They were the sons of men who either held important political positions or were "fat cat" contributors to party coffers. Bobby was a small-town son of a civil servant. In his graduation classbook, Bobby's photograph is accompanied by the following quote from Oliver Goldsmith:

“His best companions, innocence and health,
And his best riches, ignorance of wealth.”

To understand Bobby's youth it is equally important to remember the caliber of men for whom he worked. He was a witness to awesome power and awesome wealth, and he only had to look around the Senate to see that those without money were drones, and that those who had wealth had power.

After finishing page school, Bobby worked in the Senate in a variety of minor positions from 1945 until 1953. In turn, he was second assistant in the Document Room, messenger to the minority, assistant to the doorkeeper, chief telephone page to the majority, and assistant clerk to the majority conference.

By 1953 he had been in the Senate ten years. In that decade of apprenticeship, Bobby accumulated an insider's working knowledge. He learned whom to see and what to look for. He handled important documents and was privy to confidential messages. He discovered the habits, hates and idiosyncrasies of the men he served. And they came to depend on his knowledge, know-how and discretion.

He developed a knack for handling people smoothly. “Meeting people was his forte,” a friend said. Bobby had the politician's skill for remembering names and faces. And he always tried to help anyone who came to him. “I never asked for anything from him, but I knew that if I did, he'd do what he could,” the man said.

Although Bobby didn't get back to Pickens much, he remembered his family. When his mother went into the hospital, Bobby rushed home. He insisted on helping pay for her expenses. His schedule was ambitious. A friend from the page-boy days recalls that Bobby was “slinging hash” at Boyd's Drug Store part-time, attending classes at George Washington University and working in the Senate—all at the same time. After college he attended night law school at American University.

It was fitting and proper that when Bobby decided to get married, he took for a wife a fellow Senate employee. In 1950 he married the former Dorothy Comstock, and they held their wedding reception in a Senate committee room.

Bobby's close association with Johnson, as with Robert Kerr of Oklahoma, began when these two Senators arrived in Congress in 1949. A Senate employee at that time remembers that "Bobby used most any excuse to see Johnson. He admired that man and curried his favor." The two Southerners got on well. Johnson liked the aggressive young man, and he drew on Bobby's ready knowledge of the Senate and its members.

At the beginning of the 1951 session of Congress, Bobby seems to have helped Johnson in his first move toward the Democratic leadership. The position of Democratic whip that Johnson coveted was vacant, but he had been in the Senate only two years. It took a great deal of wheeling and dealing to maneuver himself into the front runner's spot. Part of his campaign consisted of Bobby's "leaks" to the press saying that Johnson appeared to have the job all sewed up (before this was actually the case). The press believed him and so, eventually, did Johnson's potential opponents. By the time the vote was taken, Johnson won unanimously.

The position of whip was ideally suited to Lyndon Johnson's talents. Its chief function is to round up votes for the leadership and twist the arms of recalcitrant members. The whip informs the leadership of the "head count" on any given vote. To know how a Senator will vote, it is necessary to know the man himself—his outlook, his constituency, his problems, and his prejudices.

Johnson was quick to realize that young Baker, with his inside knowledge, would be a valuable ally. From this point on, the relationship between the two men strengthened.

III

The Eyes and Ears of LBJ

ONE OF BAKER'S favorite stories concerns a phone call from Lyndon Johnson shortly after the Republican victory in 1952. The Eisenhower landslide had cost the Democrats control of both houses of Congress as well as the White House. It had also seen the Democratic Party leader defeated by a newcomer named Barry Goldwater.

Johnson, who had an eye on the party leadership, apparently called Baker from Texas to find out the current Washington gossip. Bobby was quick to tell his friend the good news. If rumor could be trusted, Johnson would get the appointment. At the party's first caucus in 1953, Senator Richard Russell of Georgia, who could have had the job but didn't want it, proposed Johnson, who at 44 became the youngest leader of a major party in the history of the Senate. And at the ripe age of 24 Bobby, at Johnson's behest, was appointed Assistant Secretary for the Minority.

Bobby now worked full-time for Johnson. The Republicans held a slim one-vote majority in the Senate, which meant that in the off-year election of 1954, the Democrats stood a good chance of regaining control.

Johnson's chief task as minority leader was to reunite the divided Democratic ranks, which had never been fully united behind Stevenson. Assisted by Bobby Baker, he handled the operation smoothly. A favorite tactic was to put a liberal and a conservative together on a project. For example, Johnson had Hubert Humphrey and Richard

Russell—both with a large number of rural constituents—working on a farm bill.

By the end of his first term as party leader he had healed the wounds within the Democratic membership. John Kennedy, then in his first term as Massachusetts junior Senator, said to his colleagues, "I do not believe any man ever took over a more difficult assignment than did Lyndon Johnson the first of this year. If the Democratic party stands united and once more is asserting its voice throughout the land, I think that is due to no other person."

Lyndon Johnson was up for re-election in 1954. He campaigned hard to erase the memory of his dubious 87-vote margin of victory in the 1948 primary. He soundly defeated his opponent, and at the same time the Democrats regained narrow control of the Senate.

At the opening session of Congress in 1955, Johnson became the Majority Leader of the Senate, and Bobby Baker was unanimously elected Secretary for the Majority. The vote was a mere formality, since the Secretary for the Majority is traditionally the leader's man.

When it became apparent that Ike was not going to be a strong President, Johnson's power grew. Since Baker's duties depended entirely on the needs and personality of the Majority Leader, his chief job remained serving Johnson with a second pair of eyes and ears. He also put in overtime as Johnson's alter ego. Both men spent as much as eighteen hours a day on the job; both did business in the cloakrooms. Both were known as "doers" rather than as thinkers. Both believed that politics is the art of the possible. And both gravitated to power. The great difference between them was that while Johnson constantly strove for elected office, Baker was content to work behind the scenes.

When Senator Alan Bible praised Bobby Baker as "Lyndon Junior," the Nevada Democrat unwittingly explained the relationship between the two: father and son.

Johnson has no sons, but in his employ he usually has a close aide who fills that role. Until recently it was Bill Moyers. Before, it was Jack ("I sleep better knowing Lyndon Johnson is President") Valenti, and Walter Jenkins.

Bobby's greatest assets were that he had as much charm as his mentor, and that he withstood the blistering Johnson pace without difficulty. To a degree, Bobby could handle the Majority Leader better than anyone else. He knew how and when to play up to the famous Johnson ego.

Bobby even copied some of Johnson's personal mannerisms. Friends recall that his voice seemed to take on a bit of the Johnson twang, and he wore conservative suits with vests as Johnson often did.

Of course it was always clear that Johnson was the Leader and Bobby the errand boy. He would scurry about the Capitol corridors, often scribbling notes as he walked. He hunched a bit as he moved, and as a result some people began to call him "the mole." When a Senator or official made a request, Bobby would scribble a note, stuff it in his pocket, and then take it out when he got back to his office in the Capitol basement, suite F-80, which later became known as the "F-80 Club." This was a high-ceilinged room with heavy green draperies and thick wall-to-wall carpeting. A marble fireplace is at one end of the room; a beautiful chandelier drips from the center of the ceiling.

When the Senate was in session, Bobby stood in the doorway of the chamber during roll calls, advising members of the majority on the upcoming vote, the likely outcome, and how the leadership (Lyndon Johnson) expected the Senator in question to vote.

Bobby always had the head count. He knew who was missing and why. He knew where to find a Senator, who was drunk, who wanted to avoid a vote, and whose vote might be changed. Senators of both parties often asked favors of Bobby, to help a bill, to get them off a spot, or

to help a friend or constituent. For many Senators, he was indispensable. They knew and trusted him, they confided in him how they felt or how they were forced to feel on an issue. They also confided in Bobby about personal matters.

Armed with all this vital information (unavailable to others), Baker went to Johnson. Thus the two always knew ahead of time where they stood and whom they had to work on. Johnson seldom risked his prestige by backing a measure he thought wouldn't pass.

At this time Johnson frequently held small dinner parties in his Washington home. Mr. and Mrs. Baker often attended these get-togethers, which also included important Senators from both parties and a few trusted outsiders. Johnson and Baker were at their best on the social front. Both of them enjoyed a good party, especially when combining social life with political life. Over a glass of Cutty Sark, Johnson would listen sympathetically to the Senators' problems. He and Bobby mixed freely, adding to their storehouse of information about the men who made up the Senate.

Present at one of these parties were newly elected Senator Frank Church, Democrat of Idaho, and his wife. Bobby had helped the Churches get a \$30,000 mortgage on their Washington house. Now, while talking to Mrs. Church, Johnson learned of her interest in South America. When the next Senate junket to South America came up, Johnson saw to it that the Idaho Democrat and his wife went.

Baker was always close at hand when new Senators came to Washington. He gave them sound advice on how to set up their offices, whom to hire, where to live in the Capital, and what to do to build their reputations. And what he saw as being in the best interests of new Senators was usually also in the best interests of their leader, Lyndon Johnson.

IV

Wheeling and Dealing in the Senate

SINCE THE SOURCE of Little Lyndon's power was Big Lyndon, it is important to take a brief look at the complex, multi-faceted Johnson operation.

Lyndon Johnson is one of the four richest men ever to inhabit the White House. (The others are George Washington, Herbert Hoover, and John Kennedy.) Of the four, only Johnson did not inherit his fortune. Since Lyndon—who started out as a backwoods schoolteacher—realized his riches while serving in the national legislature, Bobby Baker must have had ample opportunity to watch and absorb the techniques of combining political activity with private economic power, of using commerce to promote business and vice versa. During his time in office Johnson is said to have built up a \$14-million empire.

And the fact that these millions were earned in the highly government-regulated communications industry while Johnson, as a Representative and Senator, was in effect regulating the regulators, could not have escaped the notice of impressionable young Bobby Baker.

Not that this conflict of interest was unprecedented. To the contrary, our national legislators (with rare exceptions) demand a strict code of ethics for the executive branch, but see nothing wrong with the people's representatives representing themselves at the same time. Attempts to curb such potential conflicts between legislators and the government are rarely heard, and any legislation requiring Congressmen to reveal their financial interests to the public has been soundly defeated.

The Johnson family entered the broadcasting industry

while Lyndon was still in the House. In 1943 Claudia (Lady Bird) Johnson bought a deficit-ridden radio station, KTBC, in Austin, Texas. Johnson has always maintained that his wife was in charge of the LBJ Company. But people in contact with the broadcasting enterprise agree that regardless of whose name appears on the papers, Lyndon made the key decisions. The stock itself is owned 85% by Mrs. Johnson and her daughters and the remainder by company employees who must resell to the company if they wish to cash in their shares.

In 1952 the station petitioned the Federal Communications Commission for a television license, and the F.C.C. approved the request. At this time Johnson, in the Senate, was serving on the Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee, which is directly responsible for jurisdiction of the F.C.C. Seeing such a blatant conflict-of-interest case, Baker could only assume that if his hero saw nothing wrong with it, then there *was* nothing wrong with it.

Since the Johnsons' TV station was the only one in Austin, it was able to affiliate with all three major broadcasting networks, and the Johnsons soon had a virtual television monopoly in a city of 200,000 people. No other city in the country as big as Austin has remained a "one-channel town" for as long as the Texas capital.

In 1954, the LBJ Company purchased for \$134,000 KANG, UHF (ultra-high frequency) station in Waco—95 miles from Austin. As only a minute fraction of the area's sets were able to receive UHF (channels 14-83) broadcasts, knowledgeable observers saw the purchase of station KANG as a bad buy. But at the same time that the Johnsons purchased KANG, the first license for regular (VHF) broadcasting in Waco was issued to another company, station KWTX, which had written to Senator Johnson, asking him to help expedite their license request. On his "Office of the Democratic Leader" stationery, Johnson contacted the F.C.C. urging "serious consideration to this problem based on its merits." How-

ever, after getting their license, KWTX found that they were denied the network affiliations which they had expected. Instead, the major broadcasting companies gave their franchise to the Johnsons' seldom-viewed UHF station, KANG. Simultaneous with this setback, KWTX faced encroachment from the Johnsons' Austin station, which had won F.C.C. approval for a sufficient power boost to project the station into the Waco area.

The owners of KWTX bitterly complained to the F.C.C. In 1955, they filed anti-trust complaints with the agency against the LBJ Company. The charges were dismissed.

Defeated in their attempt to fight the LBJ Company, the KWTX owners capitulated. They bought the Johnsons' KANG station in return for 29 percent of KWTX stock. The exact value of 29 percent of station KWTX at that time is unknown. But there is no doubt that whatever the amount, it was substantially more than the Johnsons' \$134,000 investment in station KANG—the pawn they used to get 29 percent of KWTX. Later a KWTX owner said Lyndon Johnson played an important part in the merger negotiations.

In 1963, the LBJ Company consolidated its monopoly position in Austin by acquiring an interest in Capital Cable, a local community antenna television (CATV) system. By agreeing not to compete, the LBJ Company received an option to purchase 50 percent of the common stock.

CATV stations operate on a subscriber basis and broadcast taped programs. For a small monthly charge (usually about \$5) subscribers can hook up their regular set with the CATV network, and thus have a greater selection of programs. Most CATV systems operate in small city or rural areas where program selection is limited.

In 1963, Capital Cable, because of its transmission system, did not come under F.C.C. control. However, a competitor, TV Cable, had a different transmission procedure and therefore was subject to the F.C.C. ruling

that CATV stations under its jurisdiction must wait 15 days before rebroadcasting taped programs. When John Campbell, the operator of TV Cable, argued that this ruling placed him in an unfair position, the F.C.C. replied by upholding its original ruling by a 6-1 vote, thereby leaving Capital Cable with a virtually free field.

Consequently, the Johnsons' option to buy 50 percent of the CATV system was a lucrative deal. The option can be exercised by the LBJ Company (now known as the Texas Broadcasting Company) by simply paying Capital Cable half of its investment cost. This cost is considered well below the market value, and one observer estimates the worth of the Johnsons' option at a cool \$2 million.

Nor are the Johnsons' fortunes limited to broadcasting. They also have real estate holdings including all or part of at least nine Texas ranches and considerable bank stocks.

Brazos-Tenth Street Company, a Texas firm that has numerous dealings with Johnson enterprises, has at least \$1 million invested in bank ownership. The company was referred to by *Life* magazine as a "conduit agency" for the Johnsons. The Johnsons' trustee, A. W. Moursand, has stated, however, that none of the Johnsons hold ownership in Brazos-Tenth.

Moursand and another longtime friend of the Johnson family, J. W. Bullion (both of Johnson City, Texas), were appointed trustees of the LBJ Company shortly after Johnson assumed the Presidency. That the company should be placed in a trusteeship only after Johnson reached the White House exemplifies the commonly held belief that Members of Congress are immune from commercial conflict of interest.

None of this material about the making of the LBJ millions is intended to suggest that Bobby Baker shared in, or was substantially implicated in, the high-echelon financial wheelings and dealings. But to understand the plateau from which Bobby operated one must take into

account the atmosphere in which he worked. For when Bobby ultimately got into trouble mixing politics and business, he was not violating the values he had been taught; he was acting them out.

Even putting aside the propriety of mingling public policy and personal finance, the kind of politics that Bobby was exposed to was very much one of opportunity and maneuver, where policy and content took a back seat to back-scratching and the cashing in of political I.O.U.'s. This emphasis on getting things done, rather than on what is done, may help explain a mentality that was unable to distinguish right from wrong on more fundamental questions of ethical conduct.

But whatever ambitions Bobby had for himself, as long as he was working for Lyndon Johnson he was a faithful servant, and after Johnson's heart attack in 1955, Lyndon relied largely upon Bobby to transmit his instructions to the Senate instead of using his official stand-in, party whip Earle Clements.

Neither Clements, who was defeated for re-election to the Senate in 1956, nor his replacement as whip, Mike Mansfield of Montana, performed their function with Lyndon's vigor, and their relative weakness made Bobby even more important to his boss.

An example of how effective Johnson could be was his maneuvering of the 1957 Civil Rights Bill through the Senate. Part of the bill was an amendment guaranteeing a jury trial to those accused under the bill's provisions.

It was important to Johnson that the bill pass, because he already had his eye on the 1960 Democratic Presidential nomination, and he knew that Northerners would do all they could to resist a Southern nominee. But if he could present himself as a civil rights champion, he had a chance with the Northern delegates.

The liberal faction in the Senate was against the amendment; they did not believe a Southern jury would convict a white man accused of committing a crime against a Negro. Johnson believed the bill would never pass with-

out the jury trial amendment, and he knew that the conservative coalition hoped the amendment would fail, because they would then have a popular reason for voting against the entire bill.

Johnson went to work rounding up "liberal" votes for the amendment. He picked up the votes of Senators John Kennedy, Theodore Green, and 12 out of 14 Western Democrats. The amendment passed, and subsequently so did the bill. It could not have happened, however, without the manipulative skills of Johnson and Baker. On the final vote for the bill, the leadership was so successful they even got support from four Senators from the Deep South.

Baker watched as Johnson got conservatives to vote for liberal measures and liberals to vote conservative. For example, when Johnson needed votes for a Social Security bill including disability benefits, he went to one of the conservatives opposing the measure, George Malone of Nevada, and offered a trade. The Majority Leader told the Nevada Democrat he would guarantee the approval of a bill authorizing minimum government purchases of tungsten if Malone voted for the Social Security measure. Malone agreed. He had to—it was close to election time for the Senator, and Nevada is an important producer of tungsten. Malone got his bill, and Johnson got his.

And of course, as Baker learned from Johnson, he also assisted him. In the last days of the 1958 session, Republican Charles Potter introduced an amendment opposed by the Democrats, which would give special tax relief to professional people. Potter was desperately seeking ways to shore up his popularity at home, where he faced almost certain defeat in a bid for re-election. Although the Democrats were against the tax measure, most of them depended heavily upon contributions from professional people, and Bobby's head count showed that most of the Senate would support Potter's measure. John-

son's problem was to kill the amendment without alienating the professional vote.

Then Bobby drew on his store of knowledge about Senate procedure. He suggested that one of the Senators raise a question of the amendment's germaneness. This seemed unrealistic, because there is no rule of germaneness in the Senate. But Bobby knew any ruling from the presiding officer could be put to a vote.

When Potter's amendment came up, Johnson ally Robert Kerr raised a question of germaneness. The presiding officer then ruled against Kerr. Senator Kerr appealed the ruling and brought it to a vote. Tipped off ahead of time about the strategy, the membership upheld Kerr by a 2-1 majority. Bobby Baker (and by extension Johnson) had built another piece of future political credit to trade with those Senators who had found themselves in a difficult position.

Power is cumulative. And if Lord Acton was right in saying that power corrupts, it also multiplies. Thus in addition to Johnson's "natural" power as Majority Leader and his effective power as a master of the inner workings of the Senate, he also possessed two special prerogatives which he was not loath to use to consolidate and improve his position: the power to dispense campaign funds and to make committee appointments.

One man to feel the edge of both these special powers was Senator Paul Douglas. Although Douglas was the only professional economist in the Senate, he did not get the seat on the Finance Committee he wanted because of his refusal to go along with Johnson's leadership, and it was only after Johnson left the Senate that he secured the appointment.

Then in 1960, when Douglas failed to back Lyndon Johnson for the Presidential nomination, the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee awarded him a pittance for his expensive campaign in densely populated Illinois. Douglas got \$5,000, while Southern-style conservative

Allan Frear reportedly received \$22,000 for his futile effort in the tiny state of Delaware.

Since Bobby Baker was often the go-between and/or the news carrier in Johnson's dealings, some of this power (or at least the illusion that he possessed it) naturally rubbed off on him. In 1956, Johnson gave Baker an official position on the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee as its secretary. Later, Baker became the committee treasurer. The chairman at that time was George Smathers of Florida, a member of the Johnson inner circle, and a close friend of both Johnson and Baker. ("Gorgeous George"—known in the Senate for his dapper attire—is said to have taught Bobby how to dress.)

Students of the committee's policies believe that a key variable in determining a candidate's record was whether or not he supported the oil depletion allowance favored by Johnson's Texas supporters. So again Baker had a chance to see the muddy mingling of low politics and high finance.

The few Senators who managed to escape the need for contributions from the Johnson-Smathers-Baker-controlled committee were still caught by the other edge of the leadership's sword—assignments to standing committees.

The Majority Leader, through the steering committee, is in control of the Senators' assignments. Contrary to a popularly held belief, seniority alone does not determine a Senator's prospects for getting on the committees of his choice.

These assignments are vital to every Senator, for much of the Senate's work transpires in committee. A Congressman's choices are most often dictated by the kind of constituency he serves. A Senator from the Far West, for example, regards the Interior and Insular Affairs Committee as a good assignment. But a Senator from a largely urbanized state would find the same assignment worthless.

Johnson did not hesitate in relegating recalcitrant Democrats to undesired committees, and Baker helped the

Majority Leader decide who got what. Johnson did institute a new rule that freshman Senators get at least one good assignment, but how good that assignment was depended on how well they cooperated.

The amount of potential pressure the Majority Leader could apply was illustrated by the fight over Rule XXIII. This rule provides that a two-thirds majority is needed to stop a filibuster. In January 1959, flushed by the arrival of several new non-Southern delegates, Senators Douglas and Joseph Clark, backed by other anti-Establishment liberals, moved to amend the rule.

Bobby Baker was sent to get a head count on the vote, and when he reported back that the liberal faction didn't have a chance, Johnson used this opportunity to impress upon the newly elected Senators the need for cooperation. Although the Class of '58 were not overwhelmed, none of them could escape the fact that the vote on Rule XXIII would be taken before committee assignments were decided.

Then, after the proposed change was defeated, the new Senators learned how the Majority Leader operated. Vance Hartke, who had voted with Johnson, soon found himself assigned to two prize committees—Commerce and Finance—while those who voted against Johnson found themselves in left field. Ed Muskie of Maine, for example, who had voted against Johnson, was assigned to the Public Works and the Government Operations committees—anything but plum appointments.

Some days later, Bobby Baker was upbraided by a union official for the leadership's stern lesson to the new Senators. The official complained that that was no way to treat new Democratic members aided by union funds. The incident was indicative of the trouble facing the Senate leadership in 1959. The swollen Democratic majority included a large number of Northern and Western members, who chafed against Johnson's power.

Having lost some liberal support over the filibuster issue, Johnson was looking around for a headline-making

cause that could help his image with the liberal bloc, without damaging his support in the Solid South.

He settled on Lewis Strauss, whom Eisenhower had nominated for Secretary of Commerce, but who had incurred the enmity of the liberals by his action against J. Robert Oppenheimer during his chairmanship of the Atomic Energy Commission. (Oppenheimer was dropped from A.E.C. work after being branded a security risk.)

Johnson sent out Bobby Baker to get a careful head count on Strauss, and learned that Strauss would just barely get approval. No Cabinet nominee had been rejected by the Senate since the 1920's. This is the stuff that headlines are made of. Johnson told Baker to take another head count on Strauss' nomination and indicate at the same time the leadership's opposition to the nominee. Bobby found the votes needed to defeat Strauss, and Johnson announced his opposition. President Eisenhower was furious, but Strauss was out.

Although Johnson used the famous Baker head count for many purposes, perhaps the most bizarre was in 1959 when Senator McClellan upset John Kennedy's plans to gain prestige by sponsoring major but comparatively mild labor legislation. McClellan decided to introduce a strong amendment to Kennedy's bill known as the "Bill of Rights" for union members.

Bobby Baker took his head count. The leadership told Kennedy that when the vote came up, there would be enough "nays" to stop the McClellan amendment. Consequently, Kennedy was dismayed when McClellan's amendment passed. Union leaders, whom Kennedy had curried, blamed him for the inept handling that resulted in the passage of the amendment. Johnson, a potential Kennedy rival for the Presidential nomination, was unblemished by the vote.

It is significant that the techniques Johnson and Baker had perfected in the Senate failed when applied to national politics. Neither man understood that the Senate is not really a microcosm of the country at large. Thus, when

Johnson's aides informed several Kennedy-leaning candidates for the Senate that they might receive campaign funds if they stopped supporting the Massachusetts Senator, and that if elected, their committee assignments depended on whom they had supported for the Presidential nomination, all the promises and threats fell on deaf ears. The well-oiled Kennedy bandwagon was moving fast toward a victory in Los Angeles while the Johnson-for-President movement spattered. Non-Southern Democrats realized it was far less dangerous to buck Johnson than JFK.

An equally cynical and unsuccessful move was the threat a Johnson aide conveyed to Walter Reuther. The vice president of the AFL-CIO was told that if G. Mennen Williams, then Governor of Michigan, came out for Kennedy before the Los Angeles convention, the Medicare legislation so important to the union, then on the brink of passage, would be postponed.

This betrayed Johnson's ignorance of Michigan politics, for Williams was coming out for Kennedy independently of Reuther, and if Johnson knew anything about the moralistic "Soapy" Mennen, he would have known that such a threat could confirm his resolve to fight Johnson.

The threats had failed. The extra campaign money for pro-Johnson candidates had failed. And even the attempts to help Kennedy's enemies had failed. In a last-ditch maneuver Johnson, who was presenting himself as the "moderate" candidate, tried to stop Kennedy by lending his covert support to Hubert Humphrey, who at that time was regarded as the most radical candidate in the race. Humphrey was then hoping to win the West Virginia primary.

To help secure the victory, Johnson gave Humphrey the most valuable "foreign aid" he possessed—he loaned Bobby Baker. It is not known what precisely Baker did, but N. Joe Rahill, a Beckley (West Virginia) businessman who once loaned Baker \$10,000, said he saw Baker several times in the state campaigning for Humphrey. Two other persons have stated, subsequent to the Baker scandal,

that Bobby was in West Virginia on Humphrey's behalf and that the Secretary for the Majority's office contained Humphrey literature.

The connection between Johnson and Humphrey during 1960 was known to Washington insiders, but not to the general public. Some of Lyndon's oldtime friends had gone to work for Humphrey when the Majority Leader equivocated about seeking the nomination, but they returned to the Johnson fold after Humphrey lost the West Virginia primary and dropped out of the running.

After "Soapy" Williams came out for Kennedy, despite the threat to Reuther, it was Bobby Baker who suggested that instead of settling the Medicare, education, and other important bills, and adjourning the Senate prior to the Democratic convention in Los Angeles, Johnson *recess* the Senate, to be reconvened after the convention. That way he thought Johnson would hold a club over the convention.

And so the Senate recessed, with an agenda of unfinished business, and Johnson and Baker went off to Los Angeles, with a Baker head count that gave the Texan 500 delegate votes to Kennedy's 700. Unfortunately, Baker's ability to estimate national delegates proved as inept as his work in West Virginia.

At the convention Baker not only sought delegates for Johnson, but also tried to divert some of Kennedy's votes to other contenders, such as Adlai Stevenson. Meanwhile, Johnson smeared JFK's father by telling in Los Angeles, "I was no Chamberlain umbrella man. I never thought Hitler was right." In addition, Johnson accused the Massachusetts Senator of supporting the late Joe McCarthy. Thus, relations between the two men reached their lowest ebb.

The truth behind the conversations that placed Johnson on the ticket as Vice President has never been revealed. Without attempting to resolve who said what to whom, it is clear that Bobby Baker was one of the few Johnson aides to urge acceptance of the Kennedy offer.

The Secretary for the Majority had been talking up a "Johnson-Kennedy" combination for several months.

After the convention, Bobby recalled how Senator Kerr had slapped him "as hard as I've ever been hit" when he suggested that Johnson accept the number-two spot. Baker claims that after five minutes of reasoning, Kerr shook his hand and said, "You're right. You're smarter about this than I was."

Once the campaign got under way, Lyndon Johnson spent most of his time in the South, taking Baker with him as general factotum. During the whistle-stop tour, the campaign train went through South Carolina. Johnson and Baker got off the train and went to Pickens in a helicopter. It was a memorable day in the small town's history, and Johnson pleased the crowd by saying, "Bobby Baker is my strong right arm. He is the last person I see at night and the first person I see in the morning."

V

Life at the Top

BOBBY GENE BAKER was flying high when Lyndon Johnson became Vice President in 1961. And contrary to expectations, Johnson's departure from the Senate left Baker with more stature and power than ever.

Johnson's successor as Majority Leader, soft-speaking Mike Mansfield, asked Bobby to stay on as Secretary for the Majority. Bobby agreed. The arrangements fitted in nicely with Lyndon Johnson's plans to expand the powers of the Vice Presidency: what better way was there to retain some of his old power in the Senate than to keep Little Lyndon in his key position?

And Johnson had other plans for keeping his fingers in the legislative pie. In the 1960 elections he had run for Vice President and for re-election to the Senate, winning both positions. Before resigning from the Senate, he made a bold move to keep a hold on the Upper House.

At the party's first Senate caucus in 1961, Mike Mansfield put forth a motion that Johnson become presiding officer over the party's caucuses. The position had always been the domain of the Majority Leader. Even some of Johnson's old allies considered this an unprecedented encroachment of a member of the executive into the legislature. Nonetheless, Johnson's hold on the Democratic membership was sufficiently intact for the motion to pass by 46-17 vote.

Johnson also decided to remain ensconced in his garish suite of officers—known as the Taj Mahal—that he

had used as Majority Leader. Mansfield, the new Majority Leader, took smaller quarters.

Thus the Johnson-Baker Senate axis remained partially in operation. As Vice President, Johnson's chief function was to preside over the Senate. But more than that, the Senate was Lyndon's "home" and the place he knew best. Johnson, who was never popular with the Kennedy crowd, did not spend much time "downtown" around his office in the Executive Office Building. However, despite his attempts to retain as much of his power in the Senate as possible, Johnson's departure left behind a power vacuum that was filled only fractionally by the new Majority Leader.

The two men who took up the slack were Senator Robert Kerr, former Governor of Oklahoma, and Bobby Gene Baker, who was now known officially as Robert G. His father even changed his birth certificate accordingly. "It was more dignified," he said.

Kerr, who died on January 1, 1963, became the leader of the Senate Establishment. He was a man of enormous ego. In 1952 he had hoped to win the Presidential nomination, and following that defeat he had concentrated on building his power in Congress. In time he earned the nickname, "the uncrowned king of the Senate," a title bestowed on him by Paul Douglas.

Although Kerr had been a close friend of Lyndon Johnson, by 1961 the relationship had cooled. Kerr did not actively campaign for the Kennedy-Johnson ticket, and he made uncomplimentary remarks about Johnson's acceptance of the number-two spot.

Kerr and Baker, on the other hand, became even closer after the 1960 elections. Kerr is reported to have said, "Next to my wife and sons, there isn't anyone I love more than Bobby Baker." Subsequent rumors reported that Johnson resented Bobby's friendship with Kerr. The Vice President believed such behavior to be disloyal, not realizing that Little Lyndon had learned his lessons well and was merely gravitating to a center of power.

If Johnson was Bobby Baker's political mentor, Kerr was Bobby's business coach. Like almost every other person who exerted power in the Government, Kerr was very wealthy, reputedly the richest man in the Senate during his tenure.

The cornerstone of Kerr's financial empire was the Kerr-McGee Industries organization—a giant petroleum operation based in Oklahoma. Bobby Baker's first major investment, made in 1954, was the purchase of Kerr-McGee stock, valued at \$4,000 and bought at Kerr's suggestion.

Like Johnson, Kerr was untroubled about any conflict of interest posed by his personal holdings and public office. He was outspoken in denouncing attempts to repeal the oil depletion allowance, and he didn't mince words about his own position. "Hell, if everyone abstained on account of conflict of interest, you couldn't get a quorum around here."

Though Kerr saw no conflict between his position as a Senator and his business interests, there obviously was. His hearty backing of the Arkansas River Project (a proposed canal through Oklahoma is part of the project) was logical for a Senator from the affected state—particularly one who owned considerable land along the suggested route. And as chairman of the Rivers and Harbors Subcommittee, he was in a position to push the measure through the Senate.

Kerr was also chairman of the Senate Aeronautical and Space Committee. It is not surprising, then, that after North American Aviation won the multi-billion-dollar Apollo Project, it placed much of the business in North American's Tulsa, Oklahoma, plant, and that the company did its banking with the Kerr-controlled Fidelity National Bank. North American even bought land along the proposed canal.

As we shall see later, it was also only natural that when Bobby went into the vending business the biggest

share of his contracts would be with North American Aviation.

Kerr gave Bobby financial assistance privately and through his bank. In turn, Bobby helped Kerr in the Senate. He was much closer to Kerr than he was to the man he ostensibly served, Majority Leader Mike Mansfield. Said a worker in Bobby's office at that time, "Bobby operated almost on his own. Mansfield's office was in another part of the Capitol, but it might as well have been in Tibet."

Bobby's reputation for knowing the Senate was known to the Kennedy team. Bobby had even been considered as the White House's Congressional liaison man but the idea was dropped because of his close connections with Johnson, Kerr, and the Senate Establishment.

The Kennedys did call on Bobby occasionally for information. When President Kennedy found his legislative program effectively blocked by the late chairman of the Finance Committee, Senator Harry F. Byrd, Sr., of Virginia, he asked Bobby what were the chances of enlarging the committee. After Bobby told the President the move would never succeed, Kennedy dropped the idea. But members of the Kennedy Administration realized they could not always trust Baker. They were aware of his allegiance to Kerr, and they knew of Kerr's implacable opposition to some of the New Frontier's proposed legislation.

Kerr's greatest coup was the initial defeat of Medicare, a victory Baker helped engineer. When Bobby had been asked by the Kennedy Administration about the chances for Medicare's approval in the Senate, he said that his head count showed it would pass. When the bill came up shortly after, Kerr and Baker did some arm twisting that gave them enough votes to defeat the bill.

By this time Baker was in a position to branch out. He no longer was solely dependent on the good will and confidence of Lyndon Johnson. Now, in addition, he could claim the support of the new Senate strongman,

and he had created his own little bureaucracy in his post as Secretary for the Majority. At first, all Baker really had was the *appearance* of power and an opportunity for some wheeling and dealing. Now he had converted appearance into reality. He was a man to be reckoned with in his own right.

He was toasted, feted, sought after, cajoled and respected. He was giddy with power. In 1961, he received an honorary degree from his law school alma mater, American University. "For service to the Senate in one form or another," the inscription read.

Popularly known as the "101st Senator," he was quoted by the *Chicago Daily News* in 1962 as saying, "On any given issue, I have ten Senators in the palm of my hand." Some Senate observers thought this was an understatement.

In the February 1963 issue of *Esquire* a half-page photo of Bobby accompanied an article entitled: "But Who's Minding the Store?" In the photo, Bobby stood on the Senate steps, with a squad of page boys behind him. The article stated:

"Robert Baker . . . now thirty-four, is probably the most important and influential man in the Senate who isn't a senator . . . for the eight years that Lyndon Johnson ran the Senate, Bobby Baker was his right-hand man . . . he derives his power in a way that a Senator does: he's worked so long in the Senate, and gained so much respect that Senators listen when he speaks. They know they can trust him and that he *understands the Senate motto: you get along if you go along.* . . .

"Baker's power comes from doing favors for powerful people: he helps Congressmen with patronage, pork barrel, and all the niceties of Washington life. He has to do this, for when the chips are down, he must collect from the Senators for all his favors."

Ironically, Johnson's diminished power as Vice President forced him to rely on his young protégé as never before. And so Bobby's position was stronger than ever. In this circumstance, he aroused the ire of those Senators who were not members of the Establishment. But even their attacks were testimony to the strength of Baker's position.

In February 1963, Senator Joseph Clark, in an attack on the Senate Establishment, claimed too much secrecy shrouded the meetings of the Democratic steering committee when it met to assign Senators to committees. "For reasons which have never been disclosed to me, the minutes of the Democratic steering committee are under lock and key in the office of Mr. Robert Baker, the secretary for the majority." Clark urged that the records be made public "after a reasonable time."

Clark added: "... I have urged it on both the former majority leader, now Vice President Johnson, and on the present majority leader ... The present Vice President was a great leader as is the present majority leader. I respect their decision not to make those minutes more freely available, but I must state in all candor that in my judgment, the decision is wrong. ..."

Clark documented in part Baker's role in the assigning of committees when he referred to a change in the important Appropriations Committee, which was handled by "... the negotiations between the majority and the minority leaders and their able representatives, Mr. Baker and Mr. Trice. ..."

Liberal Democrats did not always use such polite language in referring to Baker. Senator Stephen Young, Democrat of Ohio, once remarked, "Somebody stuck a dagger in my back, and Joe Clark said it was Bobby Baker." Young had not gotten the assignment he requested.

Another Senator, Quentin Burdick, claimed he lost a chance for a seat on the Judiciary Committee when

Bobby Baker told Joe Clark (a member of the steering committee) Burdick no longer wanted the position.

It was obvious to friend and foe alike that Bobby had built his Congressional post into a position of real prominence. Rumors even began to circulate that Bobby might consolidate his advantage by getting a Senate seat of his own.

In the tradition to which he had been exposed, parlaying politics into power into wealth, into more power and more significant politics, Baker was building himself a real fortune. His meteoric rise to political power was paralleled by his meteoric rise to wealth. The growth of his net worth is reflected in the following estimates which he filed with numerous banks.

May 1954	\$ 11,025
Jun 1957	84,135
Jan 1959	114,944
Feb 1960	262,102
Sep 1960	278,476
Feb 1962	1,003,587
Feb 1963	2,166,887*

*This figure is overstated by \$375,700 due to Baker's mathematical errors. The corrected net worth is \$1,791,186.

The poor boy from Pickens, despite a family income that never exceeded \$30,000, had become a very rich young man. His early dealings were in South Carolina. He invested in Greenville Memorial Gardens, a cemetery near Pickens. On the advice of a sister-in-law, he bought a credit union in Easley, South Carolina. He was a stockholder and later president of the Blue Ridge Development Corporation, a housing project. He held an interest in a Howard Johnson motel near Charlotte, North Carolina.

The base for Bobby's business operations was his law office at 2000 P Street in northwest Washington. In 1955 he formed a partnership with former Senate doorkeeper Ernest Tucker under the name "Tucker & Baker."

Bobby's involvement in a law firm seemed the natural course to follow. At least half the Members of Congress practice law while holding elective office, many of them with law firms that deal directly with the Government or represent clients regulated by Congressional action. Like many Washington attorneys, Baker seems to have been involved more with influence peddling than with the law. Baker was never admitted to the District of Columbia bar, nor is there any record of him representing clients in the Washington courts. One can only assume then that the firm was more interested in exploiting Baker's position than in his legal experience.

Even without running for Congress, Bobby assumed all the trappings of a U.S. Senator: he had a law practice, a growing portfolio of outside interests, and a large circle of friends from the business world. He even traveled the banquet circuit.

In 1958 he delivered a speech to the Savings & Loan League convention in San Francisco. At the conclave, he met Max Karl, president of the Mortgage Guaranty Insurance Corporation—a Milwaukee outfit known in banking circles as "Magic."

Through his Washington contacts in the banking industry, Bobby got wind that MGIC was going to be a hot stock. Bobby phoned Karl to verify the reports, and Karl was more than optimistic. He arranged for Bobby to buy \$28,000 worth of the company's stock, and he even gave his personal endorsement to a loan on the stock shortly after Bobby purchased it. Karl also kept Bobby posted on the company's progress, and stopped in to see Bobby when visiting members of the banking committees in Congress. Later investigation showed that Bobby made subsequent investments in MGIC that netted him at least \$500,000.

Bobby parlayed these profits into other enterprises, the most spectacular of which was the Carousel Motel, a million-dollar resort in Ocean City, Maryland, designed—in Bobby's own words—as “a high-style hideaway for the advise and consent set.”

When the glittering Carousel opened in June 1962, Bobby bused his friends in from the capital for a gala party. Guests of honor at the party were Vice President and Mrs. Johnson, who arrived in their official limousine. Guests recall that there were “enough Senators to form a quorum.” So that no one on the 155-mile bus ride from Washington would get dry, Bobby installed bars with cold running champagne.

The party was a great social success. It made the front page of the society section in the *Washington Post*. Columnist Winzola Smith wrote:

“Bob Baker went into the hotel business with a 50-state splash that opened his Carousel Motor Inn, six miles north of Ocean City. . . . Guests watched the limousined arrivals of Vice President Johnson and Perle Mesta. Senator Neuberger played badminton, Senator Howard Cannon played touch football. Senator McGee was there. . . .

“The owners chose the unusual names for the Inn's two lounges, the Fog Cutter and the Sink-alagias, the latter named for the ship of Captain Blood, the gentleman pirate.”

The year before the motel opened Bobby received a finder's fee which he split with the then chairman of the Democratic Party in Puerto Rico and two lobbyist friends, Francis Law and Thomas Webb, who represent the Murchison interests of Texas.

The Democratic party leader—Jose Benitez—came to Bobby in 1961 with the proposal. Benitez told him that he had a friend in Puerto Rico who wanted to do business with a Haitian slaughterhouse owned by the Texas-